

Social Psychiatry

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Overview

The Division of Social Psychiatry has three component groups:

The Social Psychiatry Research Unit headed by Dr. Bruce Dohrenwend. The purpose of this unit is to develop and sustain a program of research on important substantive and methodological issues in psychiatric epidemiology. The focus of the substantive research is on questions about the role of adversity and stress in the onset and course of psychiatric disorders that are differentially related to gender, to ethnic/racial background, and to socioeconomic status. These include schizophrenia, major depression, antisocial personality disorder, substance use disorders (including alcoholism), and post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD). The methodological issues center on how to conceptualize and measure major stressful life events as risk factors for the development of these disorders.

The Community Research Group headed by Dr. Mindy Fullilove. This group is co-directed with Dr. Robert Fullilove from the Mailman School of Public Health, and it celebrated its 15th anniversary in September 2007. The purpose of the Community Research Group is to conduct studies of community-level processes that affect health and mental health. Over the years, it has examined AIDS, crack, violence, tuberculosis, asthma and other epidemics that have shaped life in poor neighborhoods in the US.

The Stigma and Mental Illness and Violence Group headed by Dr. Bruce Link. This group is focused on understanding the impact of stigma related processes on people with mental illnesses and their families. The initiative tracks public conceptions about mental illness such as whether members of the public are optimistic about treatment and whether they believe people with mental illnesses are dangerous and to be avoided. The initiative also addresses the experience of stigma for people with mental illnesses by examining whether and to what extent stigma seriously complicates their lives and keeps them from receiving the treatment they need. Finally, this initiative is directed toward understanding the connection between mental illnesses and violent behaviors

Staff

Bruce P. Dohrenwend, PhD, Division Chief
Mindy T. Fullilove, MD, Research Psychiatrist II

Current Research

Social Psychiatry Research Unit

Two main studies have continued over the past year in the Social Psychiatry Research Unit. One is concerned with the methodological research on the conceptualization and measurement of major stressful events over the life course. This research has been supported by a five-year R01 grant from the National Institute of Mental Health (NIMH) which ends on January 31, 2007, and by a current one year grant from an anonymous private foundation. The second project involves research on post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) in U.S. veterans of the war in Vietnam. This research was conducted with a three-year R01 grant from NIMH and has been continued with grants from an anonymous private foundation.

Community Research Group

The Community Research Group has been involved in several projects over the past year, among them Main Street NJ, (Mindy Fullilove, PI). Main Street NJ is a five-year project examining how Main Streets - a generic name for commercial, civic and social centers of cities - operate to create mental health. As America focuses on the Main Street/Wall Street dichotomy, this project will seek to deepen our understanding of the role Main Streets play in emotional, psychological and social well-being. During the course of the project, Dr. Fullilove will carry out participant-observation in Orange and Englewood, NJ and will visit 200 other cities in New Jersey, other parts of the US and other developed nations. Other ventures underway in the group, include:

- Natural History of Building an Anti-Violence Youth Center, Mindy Fullilove, PI, Columbia Center for Youth Violence Prevention
- Re-entry after incarceration, Mindy Fullilove, Co-PI, Columbia Center for Youth Violence Prevention
- The City Life is Moving Bodies (CLIMB) Project: Active Living in Northern Manhattan, Mindy Fullilove, Co-PI, Columbia Center for Youth Violence Prevention

The Stigma and Mental Illness and Violence Group

In the area of violence and mental illness three reports comparing people assigned to outpatient commitment under New York State's Outpatient Commitment law (Kendra's Law) and outpatients who did not receive this assignment were completed. Assignment is associated with improved quality of life and social functioning. The subjective feeling of coercion was associated with poor outcomes on these same variables. In the area of stigma research results from a NIMH-funded nationwide study of public attitudes about mental illnesses has shown that the public has come closer to adopting a medical model view of such illnesses over the period from 1996 to 2006. Beliefs about the dangerousness of people with mental illnesses have remained constant at high levels.

Another NIMH-funded study of the experience of stigma in people with psychosis is currently underway.

Education and Training

Dr. Bruce Dohrenwend continues on the Steering Committee of the NIMH-supported Research Training Program in Psychiatric Epidemiology, which is co-sponsored by the School of Public Health and the Department of Psychiatry at Columbia University.

Dr. Mindy Fullilove served as co-director of MPH Track, Urbanism and the Built Environment in the Mailman School of Public Health, Columbia University.

Dr. Bruce Link is Director of the Psychiatric Epidemiology Training Program and Co-Director (with Peter Bearman) of the Robert Wood Johnson Health and Society Scholars Program.

Awards/Honors

Dr. Bruce Dohrenwend received the Mental Health Section of the American Sociological Association (ASA) award of best publication at the August 11, 2007 ASA annual meeting. The publication, of which he is senior author, is titled "The Psychological Risks of Vietnam for U.S. Veterans: A Revisit with New Data and Methods," *Science*, 2006, 313, 979-982. Dr. Dohrenwend also received the Zubin Award at the March 6 – 8, 2008 annual meeting of the American Psychopathological Association on "Causality and Psychopathology." "The Joe Zubin award is given to an individual who has been a seminal figure in psychopathology research, generally in a field related to the meeting topic."

Dr. Mindy Fullilove was named to Best Doctors in America, 2008. This is a list of the most highly rated physicians. She was also selected in May 2008 to consult on "Le Grand Paris," an effort by the French government to consider the future of the Paris region.

Dr. Bruce Link received the Reeder Award for distinguished contributions to Medical Sociology in August 2007. He also received the Rema Lapouse Award from the Mental Health Section of the American Public Health Association in November 2007.

Highlights

Dr. Bruce Dohrenwend published a major paper from the Vietnam research on racial/ethnic differences in war-related PTSD. See full referenced to Dohrenwend et al. below.

Dr. Mindy Fullilove spent three weeks in France, working with the team of Agence Jean Nouvel/Michel Cantal-Dupart/Jean-Marie Duthilleul examining the Greater Paris region.

Dr. Mindy Fullilove Organized the CLIMB Project's fourth Annual "Hike the Heights," which brought 500 people to Highbridge Park, where they sang "Happy Birthday" to the High Bridge, led by Assistant Parks Commissioner William Castro.

Dr. Mindy Fullilove reports that filming was completed on "Happy Anniversary, CRG!" Produced by Tallest Tree Films. This is the first part of a larger film to accompany the reissue of a book co-written by Dr. Fullilove and her father on community organizing in Orange, NJ. The film explores issues of empowerment and how people solve problems; specifically it depicts how African-Americans organized for power at a point in which they were excluded from the re-organization of the city. CRG in the film's title stands for "Citizens for Representative Government."

Dr. Bruce Link along with Dr. Ezra Susser and others have received a \$2.9 million R01 grant from the National Institute of Child Health and Human Development (NICHD) to study health disparities by race and socioeconomic status in a cohort of individuals who were ascertained prenatally in the late 1950's and early 1960's and will be followed in the current era.

Publications

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